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Wednesday, November 21, 2007

Mount Clemens

Parents give thanks for adoptions Michigan's annual ceremony is largest in U.S.

Christina Stolarz / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- After being graced with three biological daughters, Eric and Bertha Randolph were ready for a son. But, as soon as they decided to try, plans changed: Bertha was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, making it impossible for them to conceive.

The Warren couple's dream finally came true Tuesday when they adopted Christopher, 2, who had been living with them as a foster child since he was 7 months old. They plan to adopt Christopher's biological brother, Sebastian, in the future.

"In my mind, he was ours," said Bertha Randolph, 45, who retired as a physician when illness struck. "We're so excited, and with Thanksgiving here, we have so much to be thankful for.

"This couldn't happen at a better time."

Thanksgiving came early this year to seven Macomb County families who each welcomed a new child, ages 1 to 7, into their homes on Tuesday at Macomb County Circuit Court during Michigan's fifth annual Adoption Day. The ceremonies were among 220 adoptions finalized and celebrated Tuesday across the state.

Michigan's event is the largest Adoption Day celebration in the country, with more than 30 counties participating, said Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura D. Corrigan.

"We're very proud of these efforts," she said. "In Michigan, we don't want to rest until any child who needs a home has a home." There are about 6,200 children statewide whose birth parents' rights have been terminated; of those, about 4,300 children are hoping to be adopted. An estimated 2,500 children statewide this year were placed in adoptive homes out of the foster care system.

And emotions were on high as seven more adoptions were finalized in Macomb County.

Three-year-old Eric Christopher Crellin clapped wildly and gave a high-five to Judge Edward Servitto Jr. after he granted the adoption request by the child's great-aunt and uncle.

Mary Kuhfeldt, 57, of Eastpointe, broke down and cried as Servitto approved the adoption of her 7-year-old granddaughter, Kayla.

"It's almost like nothing changed, but everything changed," said Kuhfeldt, who raised Kayla nearly from birth. "It's very emotional."

While adoption finalization hearings are normally private, many courts opened their proceedings to the public on Tuesday to educate the public about adoption and its rewards and challenges.

"It doesn't get any more important, what (the adoptive parents) are doing. They're giving them a chance at life," Servitto said. "I see so much here. This is the most beautiful thing done in court."

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Families celebrate adoption day

By ANN ZANIEWSKI
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC Just in time for Thanksgiving, several Oakland County families celebrated the final step in the adoption process Tuesday and welcomed new sons, daughters and siblings.

"It's fantastic," said a beaming Brian Wells of Northville minutes after his baby son Zachary's adoption was finalized at a Michigan Adoption Day ceremony.

Two families - the Wellses and the Ashbas of Davisburg - adopted a child during hearings that were part of the ceremony at the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Auditorium in Pontiac. Nineteen other adoptions were finalized Tuesday in various circuit judges' courtrooms.

Oakland Circuit Judge James Alexander, who presides over the court's Family Division, said the goal of Adoption Day is to promote adoption awareness and celebrate families. More than 30 courts in the state participate.

"This is the best day to be a judge," Alexander said.

Brian Wells' wife, Leann, said she felt relieved after Zachary's adoption was finalized.

"We've waited a long time for Zach," she said.

The 7-month-old was left at an Oakland County hospital in March under a law that allows parents to leave newborns at hospitals, police departments or fire stations without penalty. He has lived with the Wells family since he was 3 days old.

"He smiles constantly," Leann Wells said. "And Jacob (the Wells' 5-year-old adopted son) loves him to death."

The adoption of 8-year-old Shyanne Ashba also was finalized during the ceremony. Parents Glen and Tamara Ashba posed for pictures afterward.

"It just makes everything very permanent," Tamara Ashba said, smiling.

Shyanne, a second-grader at Andersonville Elementary School, said she felt good about her adoption.

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan, who helped start Michigan Adoption Day, also spoke at the ceremony.

She said 2,500 children were adopted in Michigan last year, while 4,300 children are waiting for adoptive families. About 13,000 children have been adopted in the state since the inception of Adoption Day, which is in its fifth year.

Alexander presented members of the Family Court's adoption unit with the Arthur Eugene Moore Champion of Children Award. Members of the division include Lauran Howard, Palmer Sesti, Debby Anthony, Julie Berz, Brenda Kelly, Marilyn McAllister, Gabrielle Osooli and Laura Roman-Christman.

The Metropolitan Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators donated backpacks stuffed with crayons, paper, scissors and other items for the children and their siblings to take home.

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A family is formed -- 'now and forever'

Hugs, joy and tears plentiful during Adoption Day

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

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GENESEE COUNTY - On Tuesday, seven sets of parents heard Genesee Probate Judge Jennie E. Barkey say the phrase they longed to hear.

To each family that allowed the normally private hearings to go public on the state's fifth annual Adoption Day, Barkey signed an order saying their adoptive children were theirs, "now and forever."

Parents shed tears of joy. Kids beamed, now an official part of a family they had grown to love.

Barkey was joined in the festivities by Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor of the Michigan Supreme Court, who summed up the purpose of Adoption Day.

"We're making the world a better place, one family at a time," he said.

Barkey, who usually spends her days as a probate judge watching families disintegrate through abuse and neglect, called adoption day "my all-time favorite thing to do."

"There's only one thing in life that matters, and that's family," she said.

Erin M. Spicer, 33, of Swartz Creek and her husband, Michael A., 32, adopted Dezwan, 8, and his sister, Diamond, 5.

The couple adopted Demtrius, 6, in 2005, and Erin said the experience was so rewarding they decided to do it again.

"I can't measure the joy it's brought to me and my husband," she said.

While the Spicers are white, all three adopted children are black.

Erin said her own parents adopted five black children who blended into her family with ease.

"This is common nature for me," she said. "It's what feels natural to me."

The bottom line is parents adopt children for love, she said, not color.

"We are the lucky ones," she said.

During the proceedings, Barkey also legalized the adoption of a boy from Korea and five siblings by another couple.

Their stories are not unusual. While many adoptions go through private agencies, others come through the state foster care system.

Officials said 2,500 children were placed in adoptive homes out of the foster care system in fiscal 2007.

Most adopted children had been living with their families for some time, making the festivities a mere formality.

Taylor said 220 adoptions were to occur in 33 counties throughout Michigan during Adoption Day.

He said the event is highlighted not only as a "celebration of adoption," but to educate the public to the rewards and challenges of being an adoptive or foster parent.

"Adoption Day is a chance to see the joy of parents and children when a permanent family is created," he said.

That joy was visible on the face of Excell Morris, 38, in tears of happiness.

He and his wife, Bettye Morris, 47, suffered through a miscarriage several years ago and believed they would not have children.

But they later took in Elaina Shapri, 2, as a foster child, and on Tuesday, they adopted her and her 10-month-old sister, Selehah Alyce.

"Now their last name is Morris," Excell said. "And they are a blessing to us.

"I have a chance to be a father after all," he said.

His wife agreed.

"This is the best thing that could have happened to us and to the children," she said. "We considered this a miracle. They just came to us out of nowhere."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Families grow on Adoption Day

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

BY LINDA S. MAH

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KALAMAZOO -- Some people go home for the holidays.

On Tuesday, Derek and Jacob Johnson, 9- and 7-year-old siblings, got a home for the holidays when they were adopted by Portage residents Ellen and James Johnson.

Derek and Jacob's adoption was part of the National Adoption Day festivities at Kalamazoo County Probate Court, where six families adopted nine children. Michigan Supreme Court Justice Robert P. Young Jr., helped preside over the adoptions. Young said more than 220 adoptions in 33 counties were planned for the day.

Derek and Jacob, which are their adopted names, were in the foster-care system for about 18 months because of parental neglect, said Colleen Cachero, an adoption worker for the Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services.

They were lucky enough to be placed with the Johnsons, who knew almost immediately that they wanted the brothers to join their family, which includes five adult biological children -- four daughters and a son -- and three other adopted boys, twins Tyree and Tyrone, and Jamal, all 11.

Cachero and Julie Urbanski, of the Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services, endorsed the adoption.

“(The Johnsons) have an amazing ability to turn troubled, traumatized children into loving children,” Urbanski said.

Cachero said the Johnsons' adult children are warm, loving and accomplished, and she loved a comment by son James Johnson Jr. who said, “My dad is really good at growing young men into strong men.”

The adoption also got a thumbs-up vote from Jamal, who said, “I like them as brothers. They're fun to play with and sometimes they teach us stuff we didn't know.”

All five young boys wore perfectly polished shoes, pin-striped suits and conservative ties. And each used a respectful, “Yes, sir” when addressing Chief Kalamazoo Probate Judge Donald R. Halstead, who allowed each to don his judicial robe and hold his gavel for photos after the adoption was completed.

“So much of our time is spent pulling families apart,” Halstead said. “It is the highlight of any judge's career to bring families together.”

He praised the Johnsons for their commitment to children, saying that in his 27 years as a judge he had never encountered another family that had fostered more than 100 children.

But the Johnsons were low key about their avocation, which they began 15 years ago in Atlanta after their biological children had all left home. “We were wondering, ‘What are we going to do now?’” James Johnson said. His supervisor, who was a foster parent, suggested they try foster care.

It was a perfect fit.

Ellen Johnson said each child is different, and her faith as a Jehovah's Witness helps her appreciate those differences and to find the strength to deal with the challenges those create.

“But having the strength of Jehovah, I know that each of the boys will be blessed,” she said.

“I like to give kids a nurturing environment and to watch them thrive,” said James Johnson, who has been a supervisor for Evergreen Packaging for five years.

And, he said joking, he always wanted a basketball team, but his daughters never obliged him. It is a different story now that he has five young sons. “When I come home from work, they’re standing outside with a basketball waiting for me.”

Adoption statistics

v 2,589 children were adopted through Department of Human Services' offices and private adoption agencies between Oct. 1, 2005, and Sept. 30, 2006.

v Relatives or foster parents adopted 93 percent of those children.

v 80 percent of children who had siblings in foster care were adopted with at least one of their siblings.

v Preliminary data for fiscal year 2007 indicate that about 2,481 children were placed into adoptive homes out of the foster-care system between Oct. 1, 2006, and Sept. 30, 2007.

v Today there are about 6,200 children in the foster-care system whose parents' rights have been terminated.

v For about 4,300 of those children, the goal is adoption. The remaining children are either older youths who are satisfied with their placements and do not wish to be adopted or youths in other living arrangements where adoption is not appropriate.

v During the five-year period in which Michigan has celebrated Adoption Day, more than 13,000 children have been placed into adoptive homes out of foster care.

More information

Children awaiting adoption in Michigan: www.mare.org.

Children awaiting adoption in the United States: www.adoptuskids.org.

Public adoption policies and data: www.michigan.gov/dhs, click on “adoption.”

-- Michigan Department of Human Services

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Article published Nov 21, 2007

21 Calhoun County kids adopted in public ceremony

Judge: 'This is the only happy thing that happens in a courtroom'

Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

MARSHALL — Crystal Smith left the courtroom Tuesday with a blue balloon and a new family.

The 5-year-old from Battle Creek was one of 21 Calhoun County children who were adopted in a public ceremony as part of Michigan Adoption Day.

Thirty-three counties held ceremonies, most on Tuesday, and made nearly 260 adoptions final, according to Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markham, who attended the ceremony in the county building for the fifth year.

"This is the only happy thing that happens in a courtroom," Retired Probate Court Judge John Brundage said. "Adoption is a time that is a blessing for the family."

Todd and Shirley Smith already have children and grandchildren but still decided to adopt Crystal, their niece, after her mother lost custody.

"We just wanted to adopt her because we fell in love with her," Todd Smith said.

"We chose to do it in the public ceremony so she would have knowledge about it," he said.

"And because this is a such a big, special day for her," Shirley Smith said.

Most adoptions are held in private, but Markham said the idea of Adoption Day is to encourage people to consider providing foster care for children and becoming adoptive parents.

Michigan has about 6,200 children whose birth parents' rights have been terminated. Statewide, 93 percent of adoptions in Michigan are by relatives or foster parents.

Mike and Deb Funk of Battle Creek adopted their 9-year-old son, Billy, in July 2005 and a second son, Devon, 8, on Tuesday. They hope to add a foster daughter, Sierra, 11 months, as a permanent member of the family.

"We started as foster parents to start our family," Deb Funk said. "We are incredibly pleased with the outcome."

Each family was called to the front and either Circuit Judge Gary Reed or Circuit Judge Conrad Sindt, sitting as family court judges, approved the adoption before applause from the crowd, lots of pictures and presentation of several gifts.

When the Funks were through, Devon walked down the line of judges and several other dignitaries, dispensing hugs to all.

"He's our showboat," Deb Funk said. "It was cool to see all the other families, and to celebrate."

James and Darlene Anthony of Marshall sat in the front row and were the first to have their adoption approved.

Joining them were daughters Veronica, 4, and Katherine, 21, as the couple adopted 23-month-old Viviana.

The little girl was just three days old when she became the couple's foster child.

"She has been part of the family," James Anthony said. "And today means she is ours and no one can take her away from us. I no longer have to look over my shoulder that someone is going to come to the door and take her."

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19 children adopted on Adoption Day

By **VICTOR SKINNER**
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—

TRAVERSE CITY -- Single mother Angela Bryan sat beside her recently adopted sons Corey and Daniel at a reception as the boys sipped juice drinks and munched on cake and finger foods.

The Traverse City woman was one of 13 families on Tuesday who adopted 19 children at the Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice as part of the fifth annual Michigan Adoption Day.

"It has been a long journey and it is a chapter that is closed in our lives," Bryan said, adding that she adopted the half-brothers from a relative who struggled with drugs and other personal problems.

Bryan worked through the probate court system to gain custody of the boys and has taken care of them for years, but attended the celebration to show Corey, 5, and Daniel, 3, that their formal adoptions are "a special event that's for them and about them," she said.

"They needed a home, they needed security and they needed love," Bryan said as Daniel peeled the frosting off his cake and flashed a food-filled grin.

Grand Traverse was one of 33 counties across the state Tuesday that held events, finalized adoptions and worked to raise awareness of children in need of a home. In Traverse City, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth Weaver was in the balloon-decorated courtroom as family court Judge David Stowe presided over adoptions.

"It is kind of two-fold today, celebrating the individual adoptions and at the same time it is an opportunity to be alert and remember we still have children that need adopting," she said. "It is particularly important for me because I was a probate judge for 12 years and it is one of the happy things we get to do. Every time I do these I wonder if that is something I should do in retirement."

Janet Kronk, case manager for the 13th Circuit Court Family Division, helped to organize the event, which formalized the second-most number of adoptions in the state.

"Many of the children have come into the court's jurisdiction as a part of a neglect or abuse case and now they are united with happy, loving families that will be a permanent situation with them; no more foster care," Kronk said, as new parents toted flower baskets and gift bags through the second floor lobby.

"There are a lot of children out there that need good, solid, permanent homes and Adoption Day is an opportunity to bring adoption to the public's front interest."

About 220 adoptions were finalized across the state as part of the national event. Over the past five years, over 13,000 Michigan children have been placed into adoptive homes out of foster care, according to a 13th Circuit Court statement.

National Adoption Day was celebrated in all 50 states in 2006 when more than 3,300 children in foster care were adopted across the country, according to www.nationaladoptionday.org.

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Photos



Dawn Bousamra holds Thomas Bousamra during his adoption Tuesday at 13th Circuit Court in Traverse City. Record-Eagle



Angela Bryan jokes with her son Corey, 5, during a reception in the Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice following adoption proceedings at 13th Circuit Court in Traverse City. The reception was held to celebrate Adoption Day. Record-Eagle



Michigan Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth Weaver and Judge David Stowe preside over the adoption hearing. Record-Eagle

STURGIS JOURNAL

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Thanksgiving

[Print Page](#)

By Audora Burg
Sturgis Journal

CENTREVILLE - 'I didn't even know you were adopted.'

Those words were among the most powerful spoken Tuesday in St. Joseph County's probate courtroom in Centreville.

The context was a local celebration of Michigan's fifth-annual "Adoption Day," held annually on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.

Unlike previous years, no adoptions were finalized on this day. But in that courtroom was a celebration of the essence of hope, of dedicated adoptive parents who work to heal broken lives.

Anita Schlabach, mother of nine, including five adoptive children, said when she and her husband got married 24 years ago, they had wanted to get involved in the mission field. Now, they realize their home has served as that mission field, through the children they have taken in.

Schlabach spoke of the four-to-six weeks' worth of challenges and tears she, her husband, and their two oldest children shared in getting one newborn foster child through cocaine withdrawal process.

Of another child: "They said he would never bond with anyone. I said that's OK - I'll bond with him." Today, he is "doing great," she said.

"I think it's important we band together as a community," Schlabach said. "These children need to be cared for - and they're just children. Even though it was very challenging and difficult, we are a better family than we were before," she said. "We're better at nine children than we were at four."

By the 'batch'

Fifteen years ago, Barb Kinney planned to adopt only "one or two" children.

"I didn't have such a good home life myself," Kinney said. "I've known a lot of battered children. I had a daycare center, and someone suggested I should foster parent."

The first child they took in was 8.



Regina Conklin shows Judge Thomas Shumaker the first official family photo taken in 1995 when her parents adopted her and her two younger siblings. At an Adoption Day celebration Tuesday, Conklin shared the harrowing story of her early years and talked about how being adopted gave her a chance in life.

"He just kind of blended in. He accepted us, we just totally accepted him," she said. "One month later, we got another one. Those two, we adopted."

She is now mother to 16, including 11 adopted children, and explains her family in "batches."

"My first batch, my second batch, my third batch, and we had five of our own before that," she said.

Some have chosen not to be adopted, like their 16-year-old foster child. Although he won't be adopted, she still claims him.

"The one we have in our home - he's ours," Kinney said. "The paper doesn't make him ours. He's going to age out with us. Or I'm going to age out with him."

One of Kinney's adopted children, Tyler, spoke briefly at Tuesday's event. He talked about being in four homes before finding permanence with the Kinneys.

"I appreciate how she helped me through all that - and adopted me," he said. "I asked her, 'could I be adopted?'"

He choked up, then finished.

"I appreciate it. That's all I can say."

From horror to love

Not a dry eye remained in the courtroom when 22-year-old Regina Conklin told her story.

"This is a very personal story and it's very difficult to share," she began. "But being given the opportunity to speak about my experience as a 'successfully adopted adult' was too good to pass up.

"Where I came from - by first grade, I had learned that men are mean and scary, and mommies don't protect their kids."

She went on to describe unspeakable horrors: of being sexually molested at 3; being held under the Christmas tree and having her nose and mouth covered, until she passed out; having hot peppers forced down her throat; potty training "lessons" where she was forced to eat the fecal matter from her "accidents."

At age 6, she tried to run away, but "lost her nerve." She was punished for her concern for her younger siblings by having her head repeatedly banged against the floor until she was unconscious.

At 6 1/2, she entered foster care with her sister. Her younger brother was placed in a separate home. When she was 9, they were all adopted.

"His foster parents wanted to adopt him. He asked if they could adopt his two sisters as well," Regina said.

His foster parents, Terry and Lanette Conklin, of Burr Oak, hadn't known of the two sisters.

"My mom says that the day they met Deanna and I, they fell in love with us and had to have all three of us, so it was a package deal," Regina said. "I'm happy to say that my parents chose me."

Lanette Conklin spoke.

"I'll be one of the first to tell you it wasn't all roses, and taking in three kids - my husband

kept saying, do you know what you're getting yourself into? And we just decided that was the right thing to do. You have to take them in as your own."

Regina, a graduate of Central Michigan University, now helps in the system that helped her.

"I work as a caseworker for DHS and I feel blessed every time I get to interact with a family," she said. "It's not a job, it's an opportunity."

One of Regina's colleagues was surprised to see her name on Tuesday's Adoption Day agenda.

"I didn't even know that you were adopted," the colleague told her.

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Meet the Robinsons

Wed, Nov 21, 2007

BY PETER DAINING

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WEST OLIVE TOWNSHIP — John and Christy Robinson spent four years trying to have a baby, and came away with two miscarriages and a lot of heartache.

Now to say the Robinsons have a full house would be quite an understatement. Since 1996, they've adopted Matthew, Marie, Anthony, Lizzie, Sammy, Jessie, and finalized James' adoption on Tuesday.



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James is their seventh child, but not their last. Christy, at age 38, is two months pregnant with what will be the couple's first birth child. Although Christy and John are ecstatic to have another little one, they are just as joyful to have each of their adopted children.

"These are all our own children," Christy said during the Adoption Day Celebration Tuesday at the Ottawa County Fillmore Complex. "That's what I want anyone who is being adopted to know, is that you're just as important as any other child."

The Robinsons live in Dorr, but all of their children were adopted in Ottawa County. Even with the Robinsons around, however, there's still a need for more parents willing to adopt.

In 2006, 146 children were eligible for adoption in Ottawa County, and there have already been more than 100 so far in 2007. Eight of those adoptions were finalized Tuesday.

At any given time, there are 19,000 in Michigan's foster care system, and approximately 4,300 with the goal of adoption.

Mitch and Charlys Boucher of Grand Haven finalized the adoption of their son, Aiden, at last year's Adoption Day, and this year they brought in their daughter, Elizabeth.

"We always wanted to adopt, but never got around to it," Mitch said while Charlys chased Aiden around the Probate Court entranceway.

A friend of the Bouchers' family was thinking about putting a baby up for adoption a few years back, spurring both Mitch and Charlys to call about it on the same day, without each other knowing.



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They didn't adopt that newborn, but soon contacted Bethany Christian Services to inquire about the adoption process. Only a month after completing all the necessary paperwork, the Boucher's received a call from Aiden's birth mother. Mitch said he knows people who have adopted from abroad, and this was much easier.

Both the Robinsons and the Bouchers have open adoptions, which allows the birth mother to stay connected with the child.

"I was a little bit hesitant of the openness at first, but it turned out really well," Mitch said.

Ottawa County Adoption Specialist Diane Prisby said she would like to see more parents participate in open adoptions.

"It's very important for these children to know their birth families, and they've allowed it to happen," she said.

Prisby also said there is always a large need for parents to adopt older children, siblings and minorities.

Judges Mark Feyen and Jon Hulsing confirmed the eight children during Ottawa County's Adoption Day Celebration. Judge Feyen also read a statement issued by Michigan's seven Supreme Court justices, which they had unanimously agreed upon and signed.

"They almost never all agree," said Feyen jokingly. "From the 2-year-olds and toddlers of this room, all the way up to the state Supreme Court, we all want to celebrate Adoption Day."

County commissioner Joyce Kortman has five adopted nieces and nephews and three adopted grandchildren.

"I'm just delighted to be here, to be with you and to celebrate with you," she said.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Please open hearts and homes to children

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

This Thanksgiving, eight local families will have so much more for which to be thankful.

On Tuesday, the families adopted children through the Family Division of the Kalamazoo Circuit Court. Their adoptions were confirmed in open court, part of Michigan Adoption Day events being held around the state.

About 19,000 children are in foster care in Michigan, more than 4,300 of whom are waiting for loving families to adopt them.

Michigan Adoption Day is designed to make prospective adoptive parents aware of the children in Michigan awaiting homes.

At a time when prospective parents are going overseas to adopt children, there are thousands of children right here who need them.

Unfortunately, many have waited for years. Children who are older, who have siblings in the foster care system or who are racial minorities are the most likely to be waiting for permanent families. Many children with physical, mental or emotional handicaps -- often the result of past abuse or neglect -- have difficulty finding families.

Healthy white infants may be in high demand among prospective parents, but children with special needs, too, are blessings to the right families.

It's not impossible for these children to find homes. In the 2006 fiscal year, nearly 2,590 children were adopted by parents who have big hearts. About 80 percent of those were adopted with at least one of their siblings. Ninety-three percent of them were adopted by relatives or foster parents.

Last year, 36 courts participated in Michigan Adoption Day around the state. On that day, more than 230 children were made permanent members of their very own families. This year, about 220 adoptions were formalized at events in 33 counties.

In the five years since Michigan Adoption Day was started to promote the practice, more than 13,000 children have moved from foster care into adoptive families.

But many children continue to wait in foster care, hoping someone will take them home permanently.

We hope events such as Michigan Adoption Day will encourage more families to open their hearts and their homes.

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Detroit Free Press

November 21, 2007

LIVONIA

**Mother to stand trial
in death of newborn**

A mother accused of strangling her newborn and leaving the body in an apartment complex trash bin Aug. 26 has been ordered to stand trial. Rebecca Horeczy was sent back to the Wayne County Jail without bond after her preliminary exam in 16th District Court in Livonia on Tuesday. The 28-year-old woman is charged with first- and second-degree murder, felony murder and first-degree child abuse.



Man faces four sex charges

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

PLAINFIELD TOWNSHIP -- A man who lived in a home that is licensed as a private day care has been charged with four counts of criminal sexual conduct involving a resident in the home, with the allegations stretching back to 2000. Scott Draves, 44, was arraigned Tuesday in Rockford District Court on two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, and two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct against a child under age 13. The alleged victim, now an adult and living out of the area, told someone of the alleged sexual assaults in the home, Kent County sheriff's Lt. Kevin Kelly said. Authorities do not believe the assaults involved children at My Buddy Daycare Center, 4004 Ambrose Ave. NE.

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Cub Scout leader found not guilty of abuse

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

By Helen Lounsbury

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STANDISH - An Arenac County jury exonerated a former Boy Scout leader Tuesday of seven counts of child abuse, allegedly against scouts in his care.

The jury found Steven D. Robinson, 35, of West Branch not guilty in connection with injuries three Cub Scouts, ages 10 and 11, sustained early this year in Standish.

Jurors spent four hours deliberating, sent a half dozen notes questioning the presiding judge and emerged once in a deadlock, attorneys said.

"They were hung up on proving intent," said Duane Hadley, Robinson's court-appointed defense attorney, following the two-day trial. "They said in one note that they were deadlocked and asked the judge to redefine his instructions on intent."

All seven child abuse charges leveled against Robinson alleged that he "knowingly" harmed his victims. The most serious charge, a four-year felony, contended that Robinson intentionally caused "serious harm" to his victims. In that instance, the scout leader allegedly broke one boy's leg by kicking him during a basketball game, prosecutors said.

The charges against Robinson stem from a scouting "lock-in," or recreational overnight, at Standish-Sterling Central High School last February. Three West Branch area boys complained to police that Robinson, a former police officer in Pontiac, hurt them during the event.

A scout leader attending the overnight, in fact, testified Monday that she thought Robinson had played too rough for children, court administrators said.

Robinson, also taking the stand Monday, maintained his innocence, refusing to consider a plea bargain earlier in the case, Hadley said.

On Tuesday, the jury didn't stop with delivering a verdict. The group's foreman asked Circuit Judge Ronald Bergeron for permission to read a statement on behalf of the jury.

In it, the juror stated that his peers thought Robinson should be prevented from serving as a leader around children because he was a poor role model, court administrators said.

The foreman also told the court that the absence of both medical evidence and police testimony shaped the jury's not guilty verdict.

Finally, the jury representative stated that jurors felt scout leaders at February's lock-in were negligent for not spotting or reporting the roughhousing.

Robinson volunteered for West Branch scouting for at least four years, without incident, since his son joined, local troop leaders said.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

44 arrested in child-support sweep

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

BY LYNN TURNER

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388-8564

KALAMAZOO -- More than 40 people in Kalamazoo County were arrested and more than \$27,000 was collected in September during a four-day sweep to find those who have failed to pay child support, officials say.

Arrest warrants were issued for about 200 people during the sweep, an ongoing program funded by the state to provide money to pay local law enforcement agencies for overtime costs for personnel involved, said K. Nigel Crum of the Kalamazoo County Friend of the Court.

"It's the first time we've done a sweep," Crum said of Kalamazoo County.

It apparently won't be the last. Crum said authorities are working out details for the next sweep.

With 44 people picked up from Sept. 27 through Sept. 30, Crum said, "we think it is a good return, but we don't really have a comparison."

An additional 20 people were arrested outside of the four-day period.

The people picked up and on the sweep list "all owed a considerable amount of money," up to tens of thousands of dollars, Crum said. There are 20,000 cases in Kalamazoo County of parents owing child support.

Some of those arrested have since paid up their accounts, Crum said.

Friend of the Court is willing to work with those who make efforts to pay but have encountered hard financial times, he said.

"We're glad to have the impact of a four-day sweep," Crum said. "It'll get the message out: Either come in and take care of your business, or we send out the police."

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Allen flaunted job to police, report says

Mayoral spokesman is facing charges of domestic violence, resisting arrest

November 21, 2007

BY BEN SCHMITT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

In an incident reminiscent of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's chief of staff telling police during a 2004 traffic stop, "Do you know who the (expletive) I am?" the Free Press obtained a police report Tuesday showing mayoral spokesman Matt Allen berated police responding to a domestic violence call.

"You don't know who I am, but you will when I get off the phone with Chief Ella Bully-Cummings," Allen screamed, according to the Nov. 2 police report.

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The incident also may have had racial overtones as police wrote that Allen, who is white, told the officers: "You black people always want to" make "things like this don't you."

Detroit Police Officer Cylvester Hill, who is black, also wrote that Allen elbowed him when officers arrived at Allen's home on Seminole in Indian Village at 2:35 a.m.

After Hill told Allen to stop, Allen said: "That's right, you people think this is a joke and you want to put this on a blog don't you?" in an apparent reference to the watchdog Web site www.detroituncovered.com.

Officers who responded to the call at Allen's home wrote in the report that Allen's wife, who is black, said he came home intoxicated and they argued in an upstairs bedroom. She told police Allen grabbed her by the back of the neck and shoved her into a wall and then pushed her head into a bathroom window, breaking the glass.

The report indicates police had been called to Allen's home a few months before, but his wife told arriving officers that there wasn't a problem.

Kilpatrick's chief of staff, Christine Beatty, made headlines in 2004 when the Free Press revealed that she admonished Detroit officers and called the police chief after being pulled over for speeding. She did not receive a ticket and Kilpatrick later accused the police of harassing her.

Those officers have since sued the city.

Allen made a tearful public apology after being arraigned on charges of domestic violence, a misdemeanor, and resisting arrest, a felony. While he stopped short of saying he assaulted his wife, he said he had a problem and planned to check into a treatment facility.

Kilpatrick said Allen showed great remorse and would remain a part of his staff, while he monitored the situation.

Mayoral spokesman James Canning said Tuesday that Allen is still in treatment and that his job status remains unchanged.

A preliminary hearing for Allen is scheduled for Dec. 13 in 36th District Court.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Food banks find demand way up

Number of people seeking help has doubled or tripled since last year, agencies say

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

BY JORDAN MILLER

The Ann Arbor News

Pallets of turkeys, cartons of potatoes, and shelves of boxed stuffing were ready to go at Food Gatherers on Tuesday, as local charities came to shop and delivery trucks headed out for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Local food banks and charities are reporting a rising demand for food. Although they're able to meet the needs in the community, food stores are going quickly, causing them to stretch their resources and ask for more help.

"It's becoming much more challenging," said Marti Lachapell, Food Gatherers' director of agency relations. "Sites that were serving 20 families are serving 40 now. We're doubling, tripling in some cases to the point where we're having to talk to congregations about how to continue to serve the people they're serving, because the numbers are going up and the resources really aren't."

Food Gatherers provides enough food to serve more than 7,700 meals per day, and this time of year is good for bringing in supplies, said President and CEO Eileen Spring.

"At this time of year, people start to think of people less fortunate than them," she said. "So we're the beneficiary of a lot of food drives."

Spring pointed out boxes of potatoes, part of a 25,000-pound donation recently given by a church in Saline. She said they're anticipating "orphan turkeys" that will start to come in over the next few days from people who received them as gifts, which Food Gatherers will freeze and use for Christmas and throughout the year.

Kimberly Green, who runs the emergency food bank for Catholic Social Services, was at Food Gatherers on

Tuesday shopping for the

family food bags her organization provides throughout the year.

"Demand has increased tremendously, at least double from last year," Green said, picking up a giant bag of Halloween candy. "But we try to get extra stuff for the food bags. It's nice for the families to have extras other than what we order."

At the SOS Crisis Center food bank in Ypsilanti, there was a nearly three-hour line out the door Tuesday, and 360 people were served last Tuesday and Wednesday, said community relations coordinator Angela Martin-Barcelona. That's an increase from last year - a trend at the food bank that Martin-Barcelona attributed to the current economic environment in Michigan.

To cope with the increased need, SOS recently installed a larger cooler to store more perishable items. They've also stepped up their collection efforts.

"The support that we've been getting with holiday drop boxes and food drives has really helped," Martin-Barcelona said. "It's something we're encouraging people to do, because we're very much in need of it."

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Volunteers feed people in need

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

BY JO COLLINS MATHIS

The Ann Arbor News

Hundreds of volunteers will spend part of their Thanksgiving making sure the less fortunate are treated to a full turkey dinner.

For the 22nd consecutive year, the Original Cottage Inn at 512 E. William will open its doors to anyone in need for a meal from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Manager Bill Res said although the restaurant provides the food, the day couldn't happen without the 120 or so community volunteers who show up to serve the meal and clean up afterward.

The nicer the weather, the fewer people who typically show up for the meal, said Res, noting that attendance was down to about 200 last year when the weather was pleasant, but up to about 400 the year before.

Also serving meals Thursday:

- Holy Trinity Church at 511 W. Forest in Ypsilanti will hold its traditional Thanksgiving luncheon from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Dimitri's Kitchen, 1511 Belleville Road in Belleville, will hold its traditional free dinner from 4 to 9 p.m. To volunteer or make a donation, call 734-699-7555.
- Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels will deliver Thanksgiving dinners to about 140 homebound and disabled residents. While it's too late to volunteer for Thanksgiving, the organization is looking for help with Christmas and New Year's Day. Call 734-487-9669.

Jo Mathis can be reached at 734-994-6849 or jmathis@annarbornews.com.

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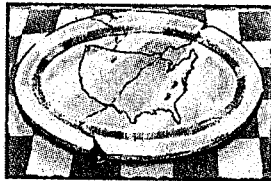
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November 21, 2007

■ Consider the people going hungry as you plan tomorrow's feast

Michigan probably doesn't need an official report to confirm what most people suspect: Hunger is an increasing problem. And with local help agencies stretched thin, it's a pretty good possibility not everyone in the state will sit down to a hearty holiday meal on Thursday.

But difficulty in getting food is not just a holiday concern; it's a year-round problem. That's confirmed in the annual U.S. Department of Agriculture survey where hunger is referred to as "very low food security" and "food insecurity." In the most recent report, averaging the years 2004-06, 12.2% of Michigan households fell in those categories.



TIM BRINTON/Special to Free Press

In other words, they were hungry and not sure they'd get food at some point during the year.

The trend is not good. For the previous three years, the average was 10.1%, and during the current period, Michigan went from being below the national average — which has held steady at about 11% — to being above it. Nearly a third of states have seen declines in food-related problems during the same period.

Another USDA study shows that nearly half of low-income households with trouble obtaining food nonetheless have at least one person employed at least part-time during the year. Another third consists of households where no one was in the labor force because of disability or retirement. In other words, most are in families where the adults work if they can.

In this land of abundance, it sometimes begs belief that food stamps aren't readily available to virtually all families with children or senior citizens who find themselves financially pressed. If you're fortunate enough to enjoy an ample Thanksgiving spread, do more than keep in mind those who may not have it. You should remember to tell your representatives in Washington that they could do more to help as well.

This tax break can help feed the hungry

November 21, 2007

More than 35 million people are living on the brink of hunger in the United States, including more than 1 million people in Michigan who struggle to make ends meet and put food on the table.

At a time when the United States is facing the highest rates of food inflation since 1990, and food pantries and soup kitchens across the country are reporting difficulty securing enough food to feed those seeking emergency assistance, it is critical that we bolster programs and policies that are proving effective in the fight against hunger.

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U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, has sponsored a bill that would make permanent a provision in the Pension Protection Act of 2006 that gives all business taxpayers a real incentive to donate rather than dump their excess food. The provision would allow small businesses, including farmers, food manufacturers, ranchers and restaurants, to reap the same tax deduction for food donations as large corporations -- the cost plus half the fair market value appreciation, not to exceed twice the cost.

Already, as a result of the temporary provision signed into law last October, the America's Second Harvest Network has seen a 2% increase in food donations in the 2007 fiscal year and a 28% increase in the amount of donated fresh fruits and vegetables. This increase is largely due to donations from farms and ranches taking advantage of the deduction.

Last year, the America's Second Harvest Network provided food assistance to more than 25 million low-income hungry Americans, including 9 million children and nearly 3 million seniors.

Our Network and hunger relief organizations across the country are working tirelessly to end hunger in America. But there is a gap to fill, and we cannot do it alone.

Hunger is one of the most solvable problems facing the United States, yet it reaches into every community across the country affecting one in 10 Americans. On behalf of the America's Second Harvest Network and all of our supporters, I am profoundly grateful for Levin's hard work on this legislation, and we urge Congress to ensure this landmark food provision is made permanent.

Vicki Escarra

President and CEO

America's Second Harvest -- The

Nation's Food Bank Network

Chicago

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Article published Nov 21, 2007

Wal-Mart to hand Salvation Army \$1M check

Stephanie Antonian Rutherford

The Enquirer

On Tuesday, the head of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., the world's largest retailer, will be in Battle Creek to announce a \$1 million national donation to the Salvation Army.

Lee Scott, Wal-Mart's chief executive officer, will be at the Battle Creek Wal-Mart, 6020 B Drive N., at 11:20 a.m. Tuesday.

Wal-Mart and Sam's Club associates will celebrate the company's support of the Salvation Army by participating in the company's nationwide Bells Ringing Across America event. During the half-hour event, workers at stores across the country will staff the famous red kettles, ringing the bells and inviting customers to support the annual campaign.

Tuesday, Scott will ring the red kettle bell alongside Salvation Army National Commander Israel Gaither and Kellogg Co. CEO David Mackay.

According to a Wal-Mart media spokesperson, the company chose Battle Creek for the announcement because it coincided with a local business visit by Scott. Last year's event was held in Bentonville, Ark., the home of Wal-Mart's world headquarters.

During the event, Scott will present a check for \$1 million from the Wal-Mart Foundation to the Salvation Army's national Red Kettle campaign. David Lunley, president of Rayovac Batteries will also be on hand to launch Rayovac's "Keep it Ringing" cross-country Salvation Army bell-ringing program and present \$250,000 to the organization.

Battle Creek Salvation Army Major Thomas Riggs said he was thrilled to have such a large event in Battle Creek.

"I am very excited that Wal-Mart is stepping up to the plate," Riggs said. "Their funding helps eliminate need locally and across the nation."

Funds donated by customers helped the Salvation Army serve 35 million people by providing basic social services such as food, shelter, clothing and financial assistance. Riggs said the Salvation Army has been focusing not only on its traditional services, but has established a strong presence in providing aide to those affected by Hurricane Katrina and the southern California wildfires.

Battle Creek Mayor Mark Behnke, who was notified about the visit Monday, said he will greet Scott and give the CEO a ceremonial key to Battle Creek.

"Wal-Mart could have picked any city in the nation, but they are here in Battle Creek," Behnke said. "I am really excited, and it's a great opportunity to bring Battle Creek into the national spotlight."

Stephanie Antonian Rutherford can be reached at 966-0665 or srutherford@battlecr.gannett.com.

14A MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2007 USA TODAY

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Downward mobility trend threatens black middle class

In the upper echelons of society, these are halcyon days for African-American achievement. Never before have so many blacks reached the highest levels of government, business, media, entertainment and sports.

At the same time, however, the success of people such as Condoleezza Rice, Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Denzel Washington and Tiger Woods has masked a troubling trend.

Reports last week from the Pew Research Center documented extensive downward mobility among the sons and daughters of the black middle class: 45% of black children from those families end up "near poor," Pew reported. The comparable number for white families is 16%.

It would be hard to overstate the significance for blacks or for society generally. It means that the expansion of the black middle class — the key to attaining racial equality since legal barriers were removed 40 years ago — is in jeopardy.

On a personal level, it gives blacks reason to doubt the assumption that America is a place where each generation will surpass the previous one.

African-Americans sense this slippage. Pew pollsters sampling black America found the greatest level of pessimism since 1983. Just one in five says things are better now than they were five years ago. Looking ahead, fewer than half say they think life for blacks will get better.

The causes are complex and interlinked, but several bear closer scrutiny.

► **Family formation.** The biggest driver of rising income and living standards of American families over the past several decades is the two-paycheck family. Too few African-Americans benefit from that trend. The percentage of married blacks in their 30s plunged from 68% in 1969 to 42% in 1998. (Whites have also experienced a decline in marriage rates across generations, but from considerably higher starting points.)

Moreover, nearly 70% of black babies are born out of wedlock, up from about 25% in the mid-1960s. Any discussion of the class divide that ignores family factors ignores a root cause.

► **Gender.** Discussing trends in black America also requires separating men and women. From 1974 to 2004, the median income fell 12% for black men while rising 75% for the women. One partial explanation is

that twice as many black women as men graduate from college.

Those stark male-female income trends affect family formation: A high-earning woman has little incentive to marry a low-earning man. This suggests sharpening the focus on the plight of African-American boys, particularly those growing up without father figures or positive male role models.

► **Education.** Achieving middle class status is no guarantee that children will start achieving in school. Studies of well-integrated, middle-class school districts, such as Shaker Heights outside Cleveland, show that parents and teachers have lower expectations of minority students. When that happens, few black students end up being challenged in the advanced classes.

Turning this around is possible. In recent years several middle-class school districts have succeeded in pulling more black students into advanced classes. Overall, however, progress is too slow.

A second problem arises in low-income neighborhoods where teachers devote virtually all their attention to low-performing students, leaving brighter children — those most capable of high achievement later in life — unchallenged. Correcting that requires teacher training and adjustment of academic goals.

► **Discrimination.** Blacks and whites have sharply different perceptions about the persistence of racial discrimination in U.S. society, Pew found. About two-thirds of blacks say blacks often or almost always face discrimination when applying for a job, renting an apartment or buying a house. By contrast, large majorities of whites believe blacks rarely face bias in these situations. Majorities of both races, however, believe that blacks who don't get ahead have mainly themselves, not discrimination, to blame.

The common thread in determining upward mobility is what social researchers call "stickiness," the social glue that keeps families intact and financially prosperous. Important parts of the formula include health care, good neighborhoods, property ownership, marriage, strong school expectations, saving habits and inherited wealth.

Just as all Americans can take pride in the nation's racial progress and in the achievements of people like Oprah and Tiger, all Americans have a stake in reversing the alarming slide in the black middle class.

Downward mobility

Children from middle-class black families are experiencing an income drop that is a sharp contrast to the national expectation that the generation will do better than the one before.

Middle-class families (2006 dollars)

White parents \$55,000

White children \$55,000

Black parents \$55,000

Black children \$44,000

Percent of middle-class children with income above their parents' income

Whites 68%

Blacks 31%

Source: The Pew Charitable Trusts

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY USA TODAY

Free Press reporter honored

Stories about kids bring changes

November 21, 2007

BY TINA LAM

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Veteran Free Press reporter Jack Kresnak was singled out Tuesday with a resolution by the Michigan Supreme Court, praising him for nearly two decades of coverage of children's issues. It was the first time the court has recognized a journalist with such a resolution.

Kresnak was lauded as a reporter whose work has inspired reforms. He has written extensively on problems within the foster care system, and his series on a 2-year-old girl who was beaten and drowned led to laws that strengthened the state Office of Children's Ombudsman.

Advertisement

"Mr. Kresnak is one of those very rare journalists who not only advance the public's understanding of the child welfare system, but also help the system critique and change itself," said Justice Marilyn Kelly, who surprised Kresnak with the award at a Washtenaw County Adoption Day ceremony.

"His work is journalism at its best: holding those in authority accountable and giving a voice to those who have none."

All seven Supreme Court justices signed the resolution.

Kresnak was at the ceremony Tuesday to celebrate the adoption of his 7-month-old granddaughter, Maya Moran. She was adopted by Kresnak's daughter, Kirsten, and her husband, Jon Moran of Ypsilanti.

"It's people like the social workers, the judges and the staff who deserve the recognition, not me, but I appreciate it," Kresnak said.

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DIRECTOR



News Release

Contact: Jan Berry (517) 373-7394 or Regina Funkhouser, MI Heart Gallery Coordinator (800) 589-6273

2007 Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in Kalamazoo

Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption

November 21, 2007

KALAMAZOO – “What I want for myself in this life is a family...”

Many of us take for granted that we are part of a family. A family provides the simplest comforts – someone who cares how you feel and asks, “How was your day?”

Sixteen year-old Danielle, quoted above, is one of 4,000 foster children in Michigan waiting and hoping every day to be adopted and have a family of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children; many dealing with the effects of abuse and neglect, medical issues, or other special circumstances.

Forty-six of these children are being featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The Michigan Heart Gallery is an annual traveling exhibit featuring professional photos of some of Michigan’s waiting children. The 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display at the Kalamazoo Public Library, 315 South Rose Street, from November 23 through December 9, 2007. An opening reception is scheduled for Wednesday, November 28 from 6-8 p.m.

“The Heart Gallery seeks to bring our communities closer to the faces and hearts of those children waiting for a family,” said Ismael Ahmed, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. “When the public has the opportunity to view these portraits and learn more about the children, we hope they will take action to consider if adoption may be right for them.”

The Michigan Heart Gallery is a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network, and the Michigan Department of Human Services. The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The children were actively involved in the photo shoot experience, some selecting which portrait to feature in the Heart Gallery and others coming up with their own poses and settings.

“While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child, so children do not leave the foster care system without having a permanent connection to a supportive adult,” Ahmed said. “We know from experience if these children are not seen, and if we do not educate the public about older children who need families, then they may be forgotten.”

Another piece of the Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features three families that have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

“These wonderful families show others that it is possible to build a loving family through adoption,” Ahmed said. “Despite the rough times they might have faced along the way, they prove how much a parent’s love and care can do for a child.”

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to other states and cities.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

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